



الخضر

al-Khiḍr or The Green Man

notes for a bayān given by:
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﴿وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِفَتَاهُ لَا أَبْرَحُ حَتَّىٰ أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقُبًا﴾

wa-ʿidh qāla mūsā li-fatāhu

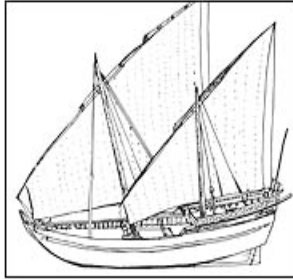
lā ʿabrahu ḥatta ʿabālughā majmaʿa-l-baḥrayni ʿaw ʿamḍiya ḥuqubā

Remember when Mūsā said to his student,

(Yūshʿa ibn Nūn/يوشع بن نون/Joshua)

“I will not give up until I reach the meeting-place of the two seas,
even if I must journey on and on for many years.”

(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:60)



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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The mountain of Qāf is the cosmic mountain formed from summit to summit, valley to valley, by celestial Spheres that are enclosed one inside the other. What, then, is the road that leads to it? How long is this road? “*No matter how long you walk,*” he is told, “it is at the point of departure that you arrive there once again,” like the point of the compass returning to the same place. Does this involve simply leaving oneself in order to return to oneself? Not exactly. Between the two, a great event will have changed every-thing; the self that is found there is the one that is beyond the mountain of Qāf, a superior self, a self “in the second person.” It will have been necessary, like al-Khīḍr (the Green One/الـخضر) (or the mysterious prophet, the eternal wanderer, Elijah (ʾIlyas^ʿa (al-Yas^ʿa /اليسع)), or the one mentioned in Sūrah Kahf (18:60-81) to bathe in the Spring of Life. “He who has found the meaning of True Reality has arrived at that Spring. When he emerges from the Spring, he has achieved the Aptitude that makes him like a balm, a drop of which you distill in the hollow of your hand by holding it facing the sun, and which then passes through to the back of your hand.”

If you are al-Khīḍr, you also may pass without difficulty through the mountain of Qāf.

On a ridge near the heart of the mountain which is at the center of the Green Island, there is a small shrine, with a dome, where one can communicate by a written note with the ʾImām ﷺ and he sometimes he will leave a personal return message there.

This small shrine stands in the shadow of the Tūba tree which, is the name of the tree that shades the Garden of Paradise (*firdows*/فردوس); it is the Tree of Being.

The shrine is at the edge of a spring, which gushes at the base of the Tree of Paradise and is the Spring of Life (Sūrah al-Kahf 18:60-65). In order to confirm this for us, our pilgrim meets there the dweller of this shrine (*maqām*/المقام الإقامه) in whom we recognize the mysterious al-Khīḍr ﷺ or also known as the Green One (الـخضر).

It is there, at the heart of being, in the shade of the Tree and at the edge of the Spring, that the sanctuary is found where the Hidden ʾImām ﷺ also may be most closely approached. Here we have an entire constellation of easily recognizable archetypal symbols.

We have learned over time, among other things, that access to the little mystical shrine was only permitted to a person who, by attaining the spiritual degree by which the °Imām عليه السلام has become his personal internal Guide (“one who does not know the °Imām of his time dies in ignorance”), has attained a state “similar” to that of the actual descendant of the °Imām عليه السلام. This is why the idea of internal conformation is truly at the center of the initiation account, and it is this that permits the pilgrim to learn other secrets of the Green Island. The inviolable Green Island is the place where his followers approach the mystical pole of the world, the Hidden °Imām عليه السلام, reigning invisibly over this age. The Golden Masjid, on the Green Island (*Jazīratu-l-Khudhra*), in the White Sea beyond the seas of the elements, is where you will find the true Shaykh, the true Guide, the true Mahdi عليه السلام. This is the °Imām عليه السلام of your own being. And it is from the “true” West, the “Celestial West” of the sacred emerald city of Jabarsa that our °Imām عليه السلام will return.



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wa-°idh qāla mūsā li-fatāhu

lā °abrahu ḥatta °ablughā majma°a-l-baḥrayni °aw °amḍiya ḥuqubā

Remember when Mūsā said to his student,

(Yūsh°a ibn Nūn/يوشع بن نون /Joshua)

“I will not give up until I reach the meeting-place of the two seas,
even if I must journey on and on for many years.”

(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:60)



Our story today is a mysterious one told in twenty-two °āyāt (الآيات) describing the story of how, when a follower of the Prophet Mūsā عليه السلام asked if he was the most knowledgeable person on earth, Mūsā عليه السلام responded in the affirmative. In °Islām the politeness is to ascribe all good, including knowledge, to Allāh ﷻ and not to one self. Mūsā عليه السلام did not do this and so Allāh ﷻ admonished him and further informed him that there *was* one more learned than him. Mūsā عليه السلام, anxious to know who this person was and how he could learn more from him, inquired from Allāh ﷻ as to his whereabouts. He ﷻ told Mūsā عليه السلام to go look for a certain “wise man”.

The name of this man is commonly given as *al-Khīḍr* عليه السلام, and he is to be found at the junction of two seas¹. Mūsā عليه السلام asks for a sign and Allāh تعالى tells him to put a newly caught fish in a basket and take it with him on the journey, saying, “the place where the fish comes alive and you lose it, is the place where you will find *the wise man*”². After putting the dead fish in the basket, Mūsā عليه السلام gave it to his student Yūshʿa and asks him to tell him when he loses the fish.

Mūsā عليه السلام then sets out with Yūshʿa and it is at this point he عليه السلام says, “I will not give up until I reach the meeting-place of the two seas, even if I must journey on and on for many years.” (variant *epoch*)

Mūsā عليه السلام goes on till he reaches junction of the two seas where they found a large boulder. Looking for the promised “wise man”, Mūsā عليه السلام found no one there. At the base of the rock, there was a spring called the Spring of Life. It was given that name because anything dead which came in contact with its waters came back to life. Mūsā عليه السلام went to sleep on the rock while his servant stood guard in the shade at the base of the rock where the ground was wet.

When Yūshʿa, his student and servant, set down the basket with the fish, the wind blew a spray with drops of water from the spring on to the dead fish which came to life and swiftly moved to the water.

﴿فَلَمَّا بَلَغَا مَجْمَعَ بَيْنِهِمَا نَسِيَا حُوتَهُمَا فَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلًا فِي الْبَحْرِ سَرَبًا﴾

falamā balaghā majmaʿa baynihimā nasiyā hūtahuma
fa-ʾattakhadḥa sabīlahu fī-l-baḥri sarabā

But when they reached their meeting-place, they forgot their fish which burrowed its way (thru a crack in the rock) into the sea.

(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:61)

(The Prophet ﷺ when asked about this said, “the fish flipped out of the basket and tunneled its way to the sea and swam off.”)

Yūshʿa watched in amazement and said to himself: “I will not awaken him.” He wanted to wait till Mūsā عليه السلام woke up. And he himself then lay down on the rock and fell asleep forgetting to inform Mūsā عليه السلام till they both woke up – not remembering that the fish was no longer in the basket. They both set out to go further. At which point Allāh تعالى says,

1. believed to be where the two arms of the Red Sea join together

2. al-Khīḍr عليه السلام is not mentioned by name but is rather called “a wise man”.

﴿فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَ قَالَ لِفَتَاهُ آتِنَا غَدَاءَنَا لَقَدْ لَقِينَا مِنْ سَفَرِنَا هَذَا انْصَابًا﴾

Falammā jāwaza qāla lifatāhu ʾātinā ghadaānā
laqadā laqīnā min safarinā hadḥa naṣabā

When they had gone a distance further on, he said to his servant,
“Bring us our meal. Truly this journey of ours has made us tired.”
(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:62)

One might think that lunch here is meant to be the fish. However, scholars have pointed out that the fish was actually meant as a guide for the location of al-Khiḍr ﷺ; this is gathered from the ḥadīth, in which the Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said that Allāh ﷻ told Mūsā ﷺ that he would find the *wise man* when he loses the fish.

In response to Mūsā ﷺ asking for food, Yūshʿa (suddenly remembering what happened before lying down for his nap, says:

﴿قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوْبَيْنَا إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ فَإِنِّي نَسِيتُ الْخُبْرَ وَمَا أُنْشِئُهُ إِلَّا الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أَذْكُرَهُ وَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلُهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا﴾

qala ʾaraʾayta idḥ awaynā ila-ṣ-ṣakhrati faʾinnī nasītu-l-ḥūta wa mā
ʾansāniḥu illa-sh-shayṭānu ʾan adhkurahu
wa-ʾittakḥatḥa sabīlahu fi-l-baḥri ʿajabā

He said, “Don’t you see what has happened?
When we went to find shelter at the rock, I forgot the fish.
No one made me forget to remember it except Shaytan.
It found its way into the sea in an amazing way.”
(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:63)

Then Mūsā ﷺ remembers what Allāh ﷻ told him.

﴿قَالَ ذَلِكَ مَا كُنَّا نَبْتَغِي فَأَرْتَدَّ إِلَى زُنْجِهِمَا فَصَبَّأُ
فَوَجَدَ عَبْدًا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا آتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا﴾

qāla dhalika mā kunnā nabghī fa-ʾirtaddā ʿalā ʾātharihimā qasasā •
fawajadā ʿabdan min ʾibādinā ātaynāhu raḥmatan min ʿindina wa-
ʿallamnāhu min ladunnā ʿilmā

He said: “That is just what we’ve been searching for.”
So they retraced their steps the way they had come.
They found a slave (ʿabd) of Ours whom We had granted mercy
from Us and whom We had also given knowledge direct from Us.
(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:64-65)

The Prophet ﷺ went on to explain that when Mūsā ؑ met the wise man and gave him greeting, al-Khiḍr ؑ asked who he was.

Mūsā ؑ replied, “I am Mūsā.”

al-Khiḍr ؑ then asked, “Are you Mūsā of Banī Isrāʾīl (بنی إسرائيل)?”

Mūsā ؑ replied, “Yes.”

﴿قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَى هَلْ أَتَّبِعُكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُعَلِّمَٰنِي مِمَّا عَلَّمْتَٰنِي مِنْ رُشْدٍ﴾

qala lahu mūsā

hal ʿattabiʿuka ʿalā ʿan tuʿallimāni mimma ʿullimta rushdā

Mūsā said to him:

“May I follow you so that you may teach me something of the knowledge of guidance which you have been taught?”

(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:66)

The Prophet Muḥammad then ﷺ said “when al-Khiḍr ؑ asked Mūsā ؑ what he wanted Mūsā ؑ responded, saying:

“I came to you so that you could teach me some of the truth which you were taught.” to which al-Khiḍr ؑ replied: “Oh Mūsā! Isn’t it enough for you that the Torah is in your hands and Divine Inspiration (*wahīl*/وحى) comes to you?” And then al-Khiḍr ؑ went on to say: “Oh Mūsā! You have some of knowledge which Allāh has taught you which I don’t know; and I have some knowledge from Allāh ﷻ which He has taught me which you don’t know.”

Knowledge and mercy should be inseparable to which we add: the search for truly beneficial knowledge is a constituent part of this.

Knowledge without mercy leads to disasters. The man was asleep. Would they awaken him? No. They would wait for him. The soul of Mūsā was ؑ unique and his mentality ؑ was evident. The prophet ؑ who had been always the leader of his people had now become a seeker of knowledge, and was not ashamed to behave like a modest learner in front of his own student and servant.

﴿قَالَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا • وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَىٰ مَا لَمْ تُخِطِبِ بِهِ خَبْرًا •﴾

qāla ʿinnaka lan tastaṭīʿa maʿiya ṣabrā •

wa kayfa taṣbiru ʿalā mā lam tuḥiṭ bihi khubrā

He (Khiḍr) said, “Surely you will never be able to be patient with me for how could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?”

(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:67-68)

When Mūsā ﷺ asked him, “May I follow you so that you can teach me some guidance from what you have been taught?” al-Khiḍr ﷺ tells him: “Surely you will never be able to be patient with me for how could you be patient in matters that are beyond your knowledge?” Here we are privy to a dialogue between two great beings concerning the acquisition of knowledge. Interestingly here Mūsā ﷺ used the word “follow” not “accompany.”

Though al-Khiḍr ﷺ implicitly refused him at the beginning, Mūsā ﷺ was insistent, saying,

﴿سَجِدُنِي إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ صَابِرًا وَلَا أَعْصِي لَكَ أَمْرًا﴾

satajidunī °in shā°a-llāhu ṣābiran wa lā a°ṣī laka °amrā

“You will find me patient, if Allāh wills,
and I will not disobey you in any thing.”

(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:69)



Now Mūsā ﷺ and al-Khiḍr ﷺ have an agreement: Mūsā ﷺ will be able to follow al-Khiḍr ﷺ provided that he does not ask about anything until it is explained to him...

Also although Yūsh°a only carried the basket he learned so much by direct experience on this journey. Later on, when he became a leader of Banī Isrā°il and took control of the Holy Land, he did this because he was a true natural learner at heart; Yūsh°a had the three merits of a true scholar: profound patience, humility and serenity of soul, and the desire to acquire beneficial knowledge. Mūsā ﷺ was his model. Allāh ﷻ says what can be translated as: “And as Musa said to his student and servant, “I will not leave off until I reach the junction of the two seas, or I will keep going even if it takes *epochs*³.”

From these events we can know that Mūsā ﷺ was really avid for learning and, as such, an embodiment of the Qur°anic supplication:

﴿وَقُلِّبْ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا﴾

wa qala rabbi zidni °ilman

...and say “Lord! Increase me in knowledge.”

(Sūrah Ṭā Hā 20:114)

This °āyah was revealed to the Prophet ﷺ when he was fifty years old, making clear, that no matter our age, we can never have or gain enough knowledge.

3. An epoch is about 25 years.

Indeed the Prophet ﷺ stressed the importance and value of knowledge in many situations. He told his companions that the angels and all creatures pray for the scholars; Allāh ﷻ helps the one who seeks knowledge; the seeker of knowledge is better than the complacent worshiper as the moon is brighter than the other planets; the Prophet ﷺ also stated the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets ﷺ and both the Companions رضى الله عنه and their Followers (at-tābiʿūn/التابعون) took a deep interest in seeking knowledge. °Alī رضي الله عنه said, “Knowledge is better than money because knowledge protects you while you have to protect your money.” °Ibn-Rushd mentioned that he never left reading and studying except on two days: the day his father died and the day of his marriage, and the Prophet ﷺ said that a day in which nothing is learned is a day forever lost.

Now when we look around us and examine the world, or just simply listen to the daily news by radio or TV or the internet, it readily becomes clear that there is a terrible amount of suffering and pain in the worlds – first, second and third: north, south east and west.

As Muslims we are taught to know that Allāh ﷻ is both Universally Merciful and Singularly Compassionate and beyond or within that we must have implicit and explicit faith that Allāh ﷻ is The All-Knowing, The Ever-Wise and The Ever-Merciful.

The decree of Allāh ﷻ for whatever befalls mankind stems from a supreme and absolute wisdom and goodness that most of us cannot recognize, and this is what the balance of the story of the Prophet Mūsā عليه السلام and the Knower by Allāh, Sayyidinā-l-Khīḍr عليه السلام focuses on.

Allāh ﷻ says in Qurʾānu-l-Karīm:

﴿وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ
إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبْثٌ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْأَرْضِ وَلَا رَطْبٌ وَلَا يَابِسٌ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ﴾

wa °indahu mafātiḥu-l-ghaybi la ya°lamuhā °illā huwa wa ya°lamu
ma fi-l-barri wa-l-baḥri wa ma tasquṭu min waraqatin °illa
ya°amuhā wa lā ḥabbatin fī-ḡhulumāti -l-arḍi wa lā raṭbin wa la
yabisin °illa fī kitābin mubīn

With Him are the keys of the Unseen. No one but He knows them.

And He knows what is in the land and the sea.

No leaf falls without His knowing it.

There is no seed in the darkness of the earth,
and nothing moist or dry which is not in a Clear Book.

(Sūraatu-l-Anʿam 6:59)

Consider the life of the Prophet ﷺ and how he dealt with the calamity of losing his son to death, which is perhaps the most distressful affliction that can befall any father – and that after he ﷺ had lost four children already, and on the death of °Ibrahīm, his son, the Prophet ﷺ wept and made du°ā° (supplication) to Allāh ﷻ. The All-Knowing knows what happened and will happen and could have happened. Not a single atom in the world shifts except by the Wisdom of the Ever-Wise. Allāh ﷻ says in Qur°ānu-l-Karīm:

﴿قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكُ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ
وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ﴾

quli-llāhumma mālik-i-mulki tu°ti-l-mulka man tashā°i
wa tanzi°u-l-mulka mimman tashā°u wa tu°izzu man tashā°u
wa tudhhillu man tashā°u

bi-yadika-l-khayru °innaka °alā kulli shay°in qadīr

Say, ‘Oh Allāh! Master of the Kingdom!

You give sovereignty to whomever You will.

You take sovereignty from whomever You will.

You exalt whomever You will. You abase whomever You will.

All good is in Your hands. You have power over all things.

(Sūrah °Al °Imrān 3:26)

But what of Mūsā ؑ? What led to his meeting with al-Khidr ؑ — when and in what circumstances and conditions?

As far as we know this search and meeting took place towards the end of the stay of Banī Isrā°īl in Sinai, which would mean almost 40 years after the crossing of the Red Sea. This being the case, he was no longer a young man or even a middle-aged man and he had been through many situations, including his and his people’s oppression under Fir°awn, his time studying with Shua°ib ؑ, his marriage and his subsequent return to Ægypt during which, crossing the desert, he experienced the miracle of the Burning Bush on the night he was made a Prophet, the further struggle with Fir°awn and his magicians, the miraculous opening and crossing of the Red Sea, the events and visions on Mount Sinai, the great sadness and disillusionment of the events surrounding the Golden Calf, and the endless wandering in the desert in which Allāh removed the habits of polytheistic Ægypt from the backs, minds and hearts of Banī Isrā°īl. In short, while he had aged, he ؑ was still an avid searcher for Truth.

Recall Mūsā عليه السلام saying:

لا أَبْرَحُ حَتَّى أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقُبًا

lā 'abraḥu ḥatta 'ablūgha mājma'a-l-baḥrayni 'aw 'amḍiya ḥuqubā

“I will not give up until I reach the meeting-place of the two seas,
even if I must journey on and on for ages.” (epochs, æons)

(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:60)

In this glorious ʿayāt, Mūsā ﷺ demonstrates an unflinching resolution in his course of attaining his goal, making it clear that nothing would stop him from reaching it, even if that in his old age it was required that he travel for *eons*. And for this fateful journey one thing was clear in his mind: As long as he had sincerity (ʿikhlāṣ/الإخلاص) for the sake of Allāh ﷻ, success was his. This shows that having determination is one thing, but coupling it with ʿikhlāṣ for Allah is something else; both are very important in everyone's endeavor in life. Mūsā ﷺ came to al-Kḥiḍr ﷺ after having long suffering of oppression and tyranny under the rule of Firʿawn and his wanderings. He considered al-Kḥiḍr ﷺ his door and portal to unconditional knowledge. The knowledge al-Kḥiḍr ﷺ passed on to Mūsā ﷺ was practical, as the most ideal way to educate is by direct practice and its application. The knowledge of al-Kḥiḍr ﷺ was about the unseen and contentment with the decree (*qadr/القدر*) of Allāh ﷻ. A know-ledge of certainty concerning the names of Allāh: The All-Knowing, The Ever-Wise and The Ever-Merciful.

Allāh ﷻ chose to educate Mūsā ؑ by three incidents relevant to humans through issues such as sustenance and livelihood, losing loved ones, especially one's children and dealing with the delay of one's sustenance, etc. We will see the events taking place in the beginning of the stories, and eventually we will observe how *qadr* reveals the good that lies behind the decrees. Allāh ﷻ says:

﴿وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ

وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

wa ʿasā ʾaṅ takrahū shayʾaṅ wa huwa khayrun lakum

wa 'asā an tuhibbū shay^oañ wa huwa sharrun lakum

wa-llāhu ya^clamu wa ańtum lā ta^clamūn

It may be that you hate something when it is good for you
and it may be that you love something when it is bad for you.

Allāh knows and you do not know!

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:216)

So having come to their agreement Mūsā ؑ and al-Khidr ؑ set off



The First Journey

On their first journey they encounter a ship involved in the coasting trade which provides for the movement of cargo and passengers without directly crossing an ocean or sea.

They find a ship whose passengers are poor but most gracious as they offer to transport Mūsā ؑ and al-Khidr ؑ for no fee out of respect for al-Khidr ؑ. When they both embark, a bird comes down to the sea to take a sip of water and al-Khidr ؑ asks Mūsā ؑ how much water he thinks the bird has sipped. Mūsā ؑ answers that it is likely to be a drop or two. In response al-Khidr ؑ says that his knowledge and al-Khidr ؑ knowledge combined are about the same amount as these drops in relevance to knowledge of Allāh ﷻ! Observe here how al-Khidr ؑ uses illustrative methods derived from nature to convey his message and make his point clear.

When they come to the end of the first stage of their journey al-Khidr ؑ punches a hole in the bottom of the ship after making sure that none of the crew or passengers has seen him *and* without explaining himself in any way to Mūsā ؑ who sees what he has done which prompts the following:

﴿فَانْطَلَقْنَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا مَرَكْنَا فِي السَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَا قَالَ أَخَرَقَهَا لِقَوْمٍ أَهْلُهَا الْقَدْحُ جَنَّتْ شَيْئًا إِمْرًا
قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا
قَالَ لَا تَأْخُذْ بَعِثْ بِي مَا نَسِيتُ وَلَا تَرَهَقْنِي مِنْ أَمْرِي عُسْرًا﴾

fa ʾintalaqā hattā ʾidha rakiba fi-s-safīnati kharāqahā
qāla ʾakharāqtahā li-tugḥhriqa ahlahā laqadā jiʾta shayʾan ʾimrā
qāla ʾalam ʾaql ʾinnaka lan tastaṭīʿa maʿiya ṣabrān.
qāla lā tuʾakhḍhni bimā nasītu wa lā turhiqnī min ʾamrī ʿusrān

So they set out till they (came to the quay) and they boarded a ship
(whereupon) he (al-Khidr ؑ) put a hole in it.

Then (Mūsā ؑ) said,

“Did you scupper it so that those sailed on it would be drowned?

Truly you have done a dreadful thing!

Didn’t I tell you, that you won’t be able to have patience with me?”

He (Mūsā ؑ) said,

“Do not take me to task for forgetting, and do not be hard upon me.”

(Sūrah Kāf 18:73)

The Second Journey

After they disembarked from the ship they travelled on for a while until arrive at the outskirts of a village where they come across some young boys playing.

al-Khidr عليه السلام stops and gazes at one boy in particular and then, absolutely dispassionately, and in cold blood, murders him.

﴿فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا الْفَيَآءُ غَلَامًا فَاقْتُلَهُ قَالَ أَقْتُلْتَنَفْسَازِكَيَّةٍبَغَيْرِنَفْسٍلَقَدْجِئْتَ شَيْئًا نَّكَرًا

قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَّكَ إِنَّاكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا

قَالَ إِن سَأَلْتُكَ عَنْ شَيْءٍ بَعْدَهَا فَلَا تُصَاحِبْنِي قَدْ بَلَغْتَ مِن لَّدُنِّي عُذْرًا ﴿

fā 'intaḷaqā ḥattā 'idḥa laqiya ghulāman

fa-qatalahu qāla 'aqatalta nafsān zakīyyatan bi-ghayri nafsīn

laqadā ji'ta shay'an nukrā

qāla 'alam 'aqul laka 'innaka lan tastati'ca ma'iya ṣabrā.

qāla in sa'altuka 'an shay'in ba'dahā falā tuṣāhibnī

qadā balaghta min ladunnī 'udhrā.

So they went on until they met a young boy whom he murdered.

Mūsā said, '(Why) have you killed an (innocent) boy who has done no wrong to you and without it being in retaliation?

This is truly an appalling thing that you have done!'

He (al-Khidr عليه السلام) said,

'Did I not tell you that you can never bear with me patiently?'

(Mūsā عليه السلام) said, 'From now on, if I ask about anything you do, send me away – you have put up with enough from me.'

(Sūrah Kahf 18:74-76)

The Third Journey

After al-Khidr عليه السلام killed the boy they travelled on until they came to the main square of a village and, finding themselves hungry, they asked for some food. The villagers however turn out to be miserly and reluctant to come to their aid and not any one of them would provide them with food or drink...or, indeed, anything.

al-Khidr عليه السلام, saying nothing, leaves them and keeps on walking as if in quest for something. He sees a broken down wall on the edge of collapse and sets about restoring it, at which point Mūsā عليه السلام grows impatient again and remonstrates with al-Khidr عليه السلام for being kind to the rude and miserly villagers in the same way that he cannot understand his sabotaging the ship of the poor kind people.

﴿فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَتَا أَهْلَ قَرْيَةٍ اسْتَطْعَمُوا أَهْلَهَا فَأَبَوْا أَنْ يُضَيِّقُوا مَآ
فَوْجَدَ فِيهَا جَدَارًا رَابِدًا أَنْ يَنْقَضَ فَأَقَامَهُ قَالَ لَوْ شِئْتَ لَاتَّخَذْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ أَجْرًا •
قَالَ هَذَا فِرَاقُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنِكَ سَأُنَبِّئُكَ بِمَا أَوْفَلَ مَا لَمْ تَنْصَبْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا﴾

fā-n-ṭalaqā ḥatta ʿidha ʿataya ʾahla qaryatin ʾistaṭʿama ʾahlaha
fā-bawan yuḍayyifūhumā fa-wajadā fihā jidārān yurīdu an yanqadda
fa ʾaqāmahu qāla law shiʿta la ʾittakhaḍhta ʿalayhi ajrā. •
qāla hādha firāqu baynī wa baynika
saʿūnabbiʿuka bi-taʾwīli mā lam tastatiʿ ʿalayhi sabārā

And so the two went on, till, when they came upon some village
people whom they asked for food,
those [people] refused them all hospitality.
And they saw a wall which was on the point of tumbling down,
and [al-Khidr عليه السلام] rebuilt it [at which point Mūsa عليه السلام] said:
“If you wanted to, you could have gotten some payment?”
“He [al-Khidr عليه السلام] said, “This is where you and I part company!
[But at least] I will give you the explanation of those things
about which you were not able to be patient.

(Sūrah Kahf 18:77-78)

Interpretation of Story One

al-Khidr عليه السلام then began to clarify matters for Mūsa عليه السلام regarding his
first journey and the ship in which he had made a hole, saying:

﴿أَمَّا السَّفِينَةُ فَكَانَتْ لِمَسَاكِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ فِي الْبَحْرِ فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَعِيبَهَا
وَكَانَ وَرَاءَ هُمْ مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصْبًا﴾

ʾamma-s-safīnatu fa-kanāt li-masākīna yaʿmalūna fi-l-baḥri
fa ʾaradtu an aʿibahā wa kana warāʾahum malikun
yaʿkhudhu kulla safīnatin ghaṣbā.

“As for the boat, it belonged to poor people working on the river,
and I wished to make it defective.

For there was a king who was taking every (good) boat by force.”

(Sūrah Kahf 18:79)

Belonging to a group of needy villagers, the ship was of economic
value to their village. The entire village depended on the small gains
the traders made using this ship.

The ship was on her way to offload goods and passengers in a village down the coast where a despotic king was seizing every good vessel that passed through his lands so as to add to his own fleet.

With this knowledge al-Khidr ﴿٤١﴾ had to cause minor damage to the vessel to protect it from a greater harm, for the king would not take a damaged ship. If al-Khidr ﴿٤١﴾ had not intervened in this way, the crew could have been killed or imprisoned and all the goods on board seized. This could have led to the loss of the provision of an entire village that was dependent on this one ship.

Interpretation of Story Two

﴿وَأَمَّا الْغُلَامُ فَكَانَ أَبُوهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فَخَشِينَا أَنْ يُرْهِقَهُمَا طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا
فَأَرَادْنَا أَنْ يُدْرِهُمَا خَيْرٌ أَمِنْدُزْكَاءَ وَأَقْرَبَ رُحْمًا﴾

wa °amma-l-ghulāmu fa-kana °abawāhu mu°minayni
fa-khashīnā an yurhiqahumā tughyānan wa kufrā.
fa °aradnā an yubādilahumā rabbuhumā khayran minhu zakātan
wa °aqāraba ruḥmā.

‘As for the boy, his parents were *both* believers
(mu°minayni / هُؤْمُؤْمِنِينَ)

and we feared that he would darken their days
with excessive insolence and unbelief.

So we wished that their Lord would grant them in his place
one better than him in purity and compassion [for his parents].’

(Sūrah Kahf 18:80-81)

Allāh ﷻ caused al-Khidr ﴿٤١﴾ to know that in time this boy would become a tyrant (*dhālim*/ضالِم) and that Allāh ﷻ would bless the parents of the boy with another more virtuous son. In any case:

﴿فَلَمْ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ قَتَلَهُمْ وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ رَمَى وَلِيُبْلِيَ
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْذَبَلٍ أَحْسَنَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

falam taqtuluhum wa lākinna-llāha qatalahum
wa mā ramayta °idh ramayta wa lākinna-llāha ramā
wa liyubliya almu°minīna minhu balān hasanan
°inna-llāha samī°un °alīm

You did not kill them; it was Allāh Who killed them.
And you did not throw, when you threw; it was Allāh Who threw,
so He might test the believers with this excellent trial from Him.

Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

(Sūratu-l-Anfāl, 8:17)

If this boy had lived he would have been destined for the fire, but his death at so young an age meant he would not enter the fire (*al-jahanam*/جهنم) and his parents might still have another son. Thus, his death was beneficial to the society, to his parents and himself.

Interpretation of Story Three

﴿وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَامَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ كَنْزٌ لَهُمَا
وَكَانَ أَبُوهُمَا صَالِحًا فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَنْ يَبْلُغَا أَشُدَّهُمَا وَيَسْتَخْرِجَا كَنْزَهُمَا رَحْمَةً
مِّنَ رَبِّكَ وَمَا فَعَلْتُهُ عَنْ أَمْرِي ذَلِكَ تَأْوِيلُ مَا لَمْ تَسْطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا﴾

wa 'amma-l-jidāru fa-kāna li-ghulamāyini yatīmayni fi-l-madīnati
wa kāna taḥtahu kañzun lahumā wa kana 'abūhuma ṣāliḥan
fa 'arada rabbuka an yabālughā 'aṣḥuddahumā
wa yastakhrijā kanzahuma raḥmatan mir- rabbika
wa mā fa'altuhu 'an 'amrī dhālika ta'wīlu
mā lam taṣṭi' 'alayhi ṣabārā

“And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan youths in the city,
and beneath it was a treasure belonging to them;
and their father was a righteous (man).

So your Lord willed that they should reach full age
and take out their treasure as a mercy from your Lord;
and in no way did I perform (this act) it on my own command.
This is the meaning of what you were unable to (endure) patiently.”
(Sūrah Kahf 18:82)

The father of the two orphans knew that the villagers were very greedy so he hid the treasure under the wall until they grew up and were strong enough to unearth it. When al-Khidr عليه السلام passed by the wall he saw that it was about to fall and so he fixed the wall to ensure that the treasure would remain safe until the orphans reached their full strength and could secure what was theirs by right.

We learn from this also that if you are an honest and virtuous parent, Allāh ﷻ will always protect your children even when you are dead, inṣhallāh. It also is another lesson in patience for as Allāh ﷻ says in Sūrah Yūsuf, “patience is beautiful (*ṣabāran jamilā* صَبْرًا جَمِيلًا): the orphans had to wait longer for their treasure but this delay was beneficial and merciful for them. In fact Allāh ﷻ mentions patience ninety times in the Qur’ān, “So lose not heart nor despair”. (*wa lā tahnū wa lā taḥzanū* ولا تحزنوا ولا تهنوا) (Sūrah ‘Āl ‘Imran 3:139)

The conclusion of these stories is that the destruction of the boat, the killing of the boy and the postponement of sustenance are all acts of mercy. Mercy is at the core of life; motherhood and family embody mercy as do the Prophets ؑ. Indeed as we have mentioned many times in our talks the Prophet Muḥammad ؑ is the epitome of mercy as spelled out by Allāh ﷻ,

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ﴾

wa mā ʾarslanāka ʾillā raḥmatul-l-ʿālamīn

We have not sent you except as *rahmah* (mercy) to all creation
(Surah al-Ambiyāʾ 21:107)

The three journeys that Mūsā ؑ undertook with al-Khīḍr ؑ taught him the virtue of patience and equipped him with a more complete level of knowledge to help him in his work with Banī Isrāʾīl who are well known for their stiff and argumentative nature⁴. His journey with al-Khīḍr ؑ taught him how the decree of Allāh ﷻ solves the problems of individuals, and consequently of entire nations.

Qurʾānic commentators (*mufasirūn*) have related several opinions with regard to the status of al-Khīḍr ؑ. Some say he is one of the Prophets ؑ; others refer to him simply as an angel who functions as a guide to those who seek Allāh ﷻ. And there are yet others who argue for his being a perfect walī (chosen friend of Allāh ﷻ).

Some commentators who have thought of al-Khīḍr ؑ as a prophet have mainly argued on the basis of the Qurʾānic reference to him as Mercy (*rahmah*/رَحْمَة). As we mentioned at the beginning, Allāh ﷻ relates in Sūrah Kahf (18:68) that al-Khīḍr ؑ is one of those who was “mercy from Us. (رَحْمَةً مِّنْ عِنْدِنَا). a characterization which usually is applied to the Prophets ؑ.

4. Please do not take this as a “anti-semitic” remark but instead remember that even when Allāh ﷻ freely fed Banī Isrāʾīl in the desert they complained the food was boring and wanted to go back to Egypt. Allāh ﷻ revealed to Mūsā ؑ, “I have ordered that the heavens may send Manna and Salwa to them from above, that the air may bake Salwa for them, that the stone may gush out water for them and the cloud may give them shade. And recall the time when your forefathers who lived in the days of Mūsā ؑ told him: ‘We cannot remain content with only one kind of food, that is, manna and salwa. We need other foods for variety. So pray to your Lord so that He may provide us with things He grows from earth. Vegetables, cucumber, garlic (or wheat), lentil and onions.’ Mūsā ؑ replied, “Do you wish that a better thing should be taken away from you and you be given that which is worse?”

So al-Khidr ٱلْخَضِرُ is ‘mercy’ (*rahmah*/رحمة) from Allāh ٱللَّهُ, and beyond *rahmah* he has been given knowledge (‘ilm/علم) from Allāh ٱللَّهُ. Here it seems plausible to argue that these qualities certainly allude to his elevated status. To possess divine knowledge is a quality of saints and prophets, but al-Khidr ٱلْخَضِرُ is evidently more than a saint or a walī since he outrightly symbolizes The Mercy (*rahmah*) of Allāh ٱللَّهُ which in the Qur’ānic sense, as we saw in the earlier quote from Sūratu-l-Ambiyā’ calling the Prophet ﷺ “a Mercy (*rahmah*) to all creation”, clearly refers to the prophetic state.

In the second part of the same verse in Sūrah Kahf (68), we read:

﴿وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِن لَّدُنَّا عِلْمًا﴾

wa-‘allamnāhu min ladunnā ‘ilmā

and whom We had also given knowledge direct from Us.

(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:68)

Commentators are more or less in agreement that the status of Mūsā ٱلْمُوسَى is certainly higher than that of al-Khidr ٱلْخَضِرُ, since Mūsā ٱلْمُوسَى is not only a Messenger (*rasūl*/رَسُول) but also a Prophet (*nabī*/نَبِي), a bearer of the divine revelation and provisions of the law. al-Khidr ٱلْخَضِرُ, on the other hand, does not hold these titles even although Allāh ٱللَّهُ calls him a ‘Servant from our Servants’ (‘*abdan min ‘ibādinā*’عِبْدَنَا مِنَّا). Ibn ‘Arabi’s account of this encounter also sheds some light on the nature of their relationship when he remarks.

“al-Khidr ٱلْخَضِرُ is aware that Mūsā ٱلْمُوسَى holds the exalted rank of Messenger (*rasūl*) which he, al-Khidr ٱلْخَضِرُ, does not...”⁵

﴿قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَى هَلْ أَتَّبِعُكَ عَلَىٰ أَن تُعَلِّمَنِ مِمَّا عَلَّمْتَ رُشْدًا﴾

qala lahu mūsā

hal ‘attabi‘uka ‘alā ‘an tu‘allimani mimmā ‘ullimta rushdā

Mūsā said to him:

“May I follow you so that you may teach me something of the knowledge of guidance which you have been taught?”

(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:66)

However, to analyze the above verse of Sūratu-l-Kahf in this context, we find that it deals with the request by Mūsā ٱلْمُوسَى to be instructed by al-Khidr ٱلْخَضِرُ.

5. See Hifzur Rahman. Qisasul Qur’ān, (Delhi: Nadwatul Musanni‘n, 1975), pt. 1, 545; cf. Ian Richard Netton. “Theophany as Paradox: Ibn ‘Arabi’s Account of al-Khadr in his Fusus al-Hikam” in the Journal of the Muhiyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society XI: (1992), 18.

This would, seemingly at least, put al-Khīḍr ؑ at a higher hierarchical position than that of Mūsā ؑ, as why would it be that a Prophet ؑ would have to seek special direct knowledge (*miñ ladunnā ʿilmā*) of Allāh ﷻ from someone of a lower position in the hierarchy than himself?

﴿قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَى هَلْ أَتَّبِعُكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُعَلِّمَ مِن مَّا عَلِّمْتَ رُشْدًا﴾

qala lahu mūsā

hal ʿattabiʿuka ʿalā ʿan tuʿallimāni mimmā ʿullimta rushdā

Mūsā said to him:

“May I follow you so that you may teach me something of the knowledge of guidance which you have been taught?”

(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:66)

The emphasis here is on two key words which perhaps determine the overall meaning of the verse, ʿattabiʿuka and tuʿallimāni which may have direct bearing upon the status of al-Khīḍr ؑ.

hal ʿattabiʿuka ʿalā ʿan tuʿallimāni mimmā ʿullimta rushdā

that you may teach me something

of the knowledge of guidance which you have been taught?”

As we can see here the translation of *tuʿallimāni* is to ‘teach me’. Mūsā ؑ, therefore, is requesting al-Khīḍr ؑ to “instruct” or “teach him” him “in the direct knowledge...of the right way” (Qurʾān 18:66). Since Mūsā ؑ in the Islamic tradition is regarded as a prophet as well as a messenger; bearer of the divine commandments, and conveyer of truth of Allāh ﷻ to his people, his seeking of know-ledge from a non-prophet does not fit the criterion of the divine wisdom given to all prophets. A prophet is the Mercy (*rahmah*) of Allāh ﷻ as well as a bearer of the knowledge given to none other than prophets. It can be said that it would not be possible for al-Khīḍr ؑ, firstly, to have knowledge from Allāh ﷻ, and, secondly, to “instruct” Mūsā ؑ in that knowledge he is given by Allāh ﷻ, without being a prophet, or for that matter Mercy himself. It would be absurd to believe that Mūsā ؑ, of all the messengers of Allāh ﷻ, was somehow less in knowledge than a non-prophet.

At this point, however, it must be noted that the concept of *rahmah* is closely linked with divine ‘guidance’ either in the form of revelation given to the prophets or simply by their mere presence and witness to the people.

The prophecy of al-Khiḍr ؑ thus is the 'prophecy of walaya' (*nubuwwatu-l-wilāyat*) whereas that of Mūsā ؑ is characterized as the 'prophecy of institution' (*nubuwwatu-l-tashrī*).

Going back to the origin of the story we find a different set of arguments emerging from the rationale behind the search of Mūsā ؑ for and subsequent meeting with al-Khiḍr ؑ. And this sheds further light on an overall understanding of the story. It begins with Mūsā ؑ making a claim about being the most learned of all men in the world.⁶ According to a ḥadīth, once when Mūsā ؑ delivered an impressive sermon, an Israelite inquired if there was anyone more knowledgeable than him. When Mūsā ؑ denied any such person existed, he received a revelation from Allāh ﷻ, which admonished him ؑ for not attributing absolute knowledge to Allāh ﷻ and informed Mūsā ؑ that there was a wise man named al-Khiḍr ؑ who was more knowledgeable than he was:

"[Due to this belief]...he no longer tried to acquire more knowledge. So Allāh ﷻ sought for an occasion to stimulate him to obtain more knowledge...[and one day after his address to his people] one of them asked him: 'Can there be found anybody more learned than you?' He replied: 'No, such a man I never met'. Then Allāh ﷻ revealed: 'Yes, such a man does exist. Our servant al-Khiḍr ؑ is more learned than you are'"⁷

As we can see, Mūsā ؑ, by holding such a belief, created a necessity of being instructed by someone who surpassed him in knowledge. Although one may argue that the reason for such an 'instruction' was the manner in which he proclaimed it, the fact remains that Mūsā ؑ was the most knowledgeable of all men of his time as he was a resolute prophet of distinction in steadfastness, and yet there was a sense of 'the absolute' in his tone for which Allāh ﷻ arranged his meeting with al-Khiḍr ؑ to teach him the Truth.

It is in this context that many commentators regard Khidr ؑ as one of the prophets. The Qurʾānic concept of *rahmah*, analysed above, also suggests the outlook and moreover indicates that both Mūsā and al-Khiḍr ؑ possess divine knowledge but al-Khiḍr ؑ possessed a certain type of knowledge called "*ilm min-la dunna*" which we may understand as direct knowledge from Allāh ﷻ.

6. Muḥammad Shafī. *Maʿarif al-Qurʾān* [Dar al-Maʿarif. 1978). vol. V: p59]

7. M.S. Baljon. (tr.). *A mystical Interpretation of Prophetic Tales by an Indian Muslim: Shah Wali Allah's Tawil al-Aḥadith* (Leiden: E.J. Brill. 1973). p39

On the one hand, Mūsā is placed above al-Khidr in rank as a messenger; on the other but it is argued that they possess different kinds of knowledge. This latter position is particularly held by Ibn ʿArabī, mainly, its order to present the elevated status of the esoteric knowledge and, “of the gnosis that perceives not only the necessity for and validity of [the] Law, but also the inescapable validity and necessity of those aspects of cosmic becoming that elude the Law...”⁸

[An example of what we mean by *direct knowledge* can be found in this quote from Mawlanā Zakariyah which he mentions in *Fazaa'il-e-Hajj*, “Once one of the ʿAbdāl met Khidr and inquired from him whether he had ever met anyone among the saints whom he considered higher in rank than himself. To this he replied, ‘Yes, I have. I was present once in the Masjid in Madīnah, where I saw Hazrat Shaikh Abdur Razzaq teaching ḥadīth to his students. On one side was a young man sitting with his head bent on his knees. I went to him and addressed him thus, ‘do you not see the gathering listening to the words of Rasoolullah. Why do you not join them?’ Without lifting up his head or turning in my direction the youth answered: “Over there you see those who listen to the Hadeeth from the mouth of Abdur-Razzak (the slave of the sustainer), while over here you see him who listens to Hadeeth directly from Ar-Razzaq (Allah).” Khidr said to him, “If what you say is true then you should be able to tell me who I am. Who am I?” He lifted up his head and said, ‘If my intuition does not fail me then you are Khidr.’ Hazrat Khidr said, “From that I realized that among the ʿawliya of Allah there are such who are so exalted in rank that I cannot recognize them.”⁹] (this is an exact quote hence the missing diacritical marks)

So long as he has not attained to Reality, the servant cannot be sincerely devout, because the disloyal human attributes will only be annihilated by the manifestation of the Divine Essence, and ignorance will only be removed by direct knowledge of the Divine Essence. Allāh will teach him an esoteric knowledge from His Presence, without intermediary, so he will come to know Him through His instruction, and worship Him through His teaching, as in the case of the above.

8. R.WJ. Austin, *The Bezels of Wisdom* (New York: Paulist Press. 1980). p250

9. Fazaail-e-Amaal, Virtues of Hajj, (Eng. Trans.), Chapter.9, story no.9, p.171, (New Edition 1982, Published by Dini Book Depot - Delhi

Once he has reached this stage, the servant will witness the holy spirits. He will come to know the Prophet ﷺ, who will tell him about everything from the beginning to the end, and all the other Prophets عليهم السلام will give him glad tidings of the eternal communion.

As Allāh ﷻ has said:

﴿وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ
وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ أُولَٰئِكَ رَفِيقًا﴾

wa mañy-yuṭi°i-llāha wa-r-rasula fa°-ulā°ika ma°a-lladhīna
°an°ama-llāhu °alayhim-mina-n-nabiyyina wa-ṣ-ṣiddiqīna wa-ṣh-
shuhadā°i wa-ṣ-ṣālihīn: wa ḥasuna °ulāā°ika rafīqā

Whoever obeys Allāh and the Messenger
will be with those whom Allāh has blessed:
the Prophets and the Truthful, the Martyrs and the Righteous.
What excellent company such people are!

(Sūratu-n-Nisā° 4:69)

If someone has not acquired this knowledge, he is not a scholar (°alim) in reality, even if he has read a million books. Inasmuch as he does not reach the spiritual level, even though he performs the physical practcies in accord with the outer aspects of the orders of Allāh ﷻ, his recompense will be the Garden of Paradise, and that alone. Only the reflection of the [Divine] attributes will be manifest there. The scholar does not gain access, by exoteric knowledge alone, to the Holy Sanctuary and nearness [to the Lord], because that is the realm of flight, and birds do not fly without wings.

If the servant (°abd) acts in accordance with both exoteric and esoteric knowledge, he will reach that realm. As Allāh ﷻ has said in the Ḥadīth Qudsī:

“Oh My servant, if you wish to enter My sanctuary, you must pay no attention to the dominion [of this world], the realm of Sovereignty [Malakūt] and the realm of Omnipotence [Jabarūt], because the dominion [of this world] (ad-dunyā) is the devil of the scholar, the realm of Sovereignty is the devil of the direct knower, and the realm of Omnipotence is the devil of the overseer.

If someone takes notice of any one of these temptations, he is an outcast in the sight of Allāh ﷻ, meaning an outcast from nearness, not an outcast from the eternal abode (al-jannah) of the Garden.

Such are those who seek nearness, but fail to reach it, because they are distracted by desire, and because they only have one wing. So though they have the Garden they do not have the Nearness (*qurb*).

As for the People of Nearness (*muqarabīn*), they receive that which no eye has ever seen, of which no ear has ever heard, and which has never occurred to a human heart. That is the Garden of Nearness, in which there are neither houries nor palaces.

The human being needs to recognize his true value, and he must not claim for himself what is not his right and proper due. °Alī ؑ said: “May Allāh ؑ have mercy on a man who knows his own worth, who does not go beyond his limit, who guards his tongue, and who does not waste his life.”

The scholar must therefore comprehend the meaning of the reality of the human being, called the Child of Inner Meanings. He must train that child to practice constant affirmation of the Names of Oneness, and to leave the realm of physicality for the realm of spirituality, which is the realm of mystery, where there are no abodes except that of Allāh ؑ. That realm is like a desert of light, to which there is no end. The child of inner meanings flies over it, and beholds its strange and marvelous wonders which are impossible to describe. It is the place of those affirmers of Oneness who lost their own identity in the eye of Singularity. The sight of Beauty of Allāh ؑ left them with no existence since staring at the sun makes everything else invisible. Without doubt, a human being cannot see his own self at the same time as the Beauty of Allāh ؑ.

As °Isā ؑ said: “The human being does not enter the Kingdom of the Heavens, unless he is born twice, as the birds are born twice.” This refers to the birth of the child of spiritual meanings from the reality of human capability. That is the secret of the human being. It is conceived and born from the union of the science of the Sacred Law and the science of Reality, just as a child results from the union of two fluids; one from the man and one from the woman. As Allāh ؑ has said:

﴿إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا﴾

°innā khalāqna-l-°insāna min-nutfatin °amshājīn-nabātalīhi
fa ja°alnāhu samī°an baṣīrā

We created man from a drop of mingled fluids to put him to the test.
We gave him hearing and sight.

(Sūratu-l-°Inṣān° 76:2)

After the manifestation of this inner meaning, it becomes a simple matter to pass from the surface of the oceans of creation to the depths of the commandment. In comparison with the realm of the spirit, every other realm is like a drop of water. After that [manifestation], spiritual and esoteric sciences are communicated without a letter and without a sound.

Returning to al-Khidr ؑ. According to early Islamic historians, al-Khidr ؑ was also the teacher and guide of Dhū-l-Qarnayn (ذو القرنين) ؑ in the guise of his cook. Dhū-l-Qarnayn means the ‘two horned’ and also the man of two centuries (*qarnayn*/قرنين) because he lived at a time when one century turned into another. He is considered by many Muslim historians to be identical with Alexander the Great of Macedonia (4th cent. BC) though there are those who disagree with this. al-Bayzawi says, “He was Sikandar ar-Rumi, King of Persia and Greece.” al-Qastalani, the commentator on al-Bukhārī says, “Dhū-l-Qarnayn was a king, Sikandar, whose teacher was al-Khidr ؑ.”

The story of Dhū-l-Qarnayn ؑ appears in seventeen short verses (18:83-99) of Surah al-Kahf. The Qurʾānic story describes a prophet called Dhū-l-Qarnayn ؑ to whom Allāh ﷻ gave great powers, and who traveled to the place of the rising and setting of the sun, where he found the sun setting in a murky (or boiling) sea. Importantly, and in relation to the above, Dhū-l-Qarnayn ؑ is represented as having set out to reach the End of the World or the Land of Darkness in search of the Water of Life but (similar in part to the story of al-Khidr ؑ and Mūsā ؑ) but they also come to a parting of the ways and each follows a different path, but al-Khidr ؑ alone accomplishes the quest for the Water of Life.

Nizamī attributes this parting of the ways to Dhū-l-Qarnayn’s eagerness (or impatience) to find the Water of Life whereas in the case of al-Khidr ؑ the Water of Life came to him without his actively seeking it. al-Khidr ؑ, the cook, (*n.b.* some historians say he was a general) did so naturally and in the course of duty, whereas Dhū-l-Qarnayn was following his ‘own’ plan with a sense of personal accomplishment or authorship. In this sense, Dhū-l-Qarnayn failed in the quest because he was, as it were, seeking to accomplish the quest on his own terms. In modern terminology he was going to do “his own thing”. In contrast, al-Khidr ؑ found the Water of Life without even suspecting it. In any case these are all just stories or parables, but what we want to draw the reader/listeners attention to is the matter or subject of the “Water of Life.”

In India, the Prophet or Saint (*walī*) known as Khwaja Khizr (al-Khīḍr الخضر), Pir Badar, or Raja Kidar, is the object of a still surviving popular cult, common to both Muslims and Hindus. His principal shrine is on the Indus near Bakhar, where he is worshipped by devotees of both persuasions; the cult is however hardly less widely diffused in Bihar and Bengal. In the Hindu cult, the Khwaja is worshipped with lights and by feeding Brahmans at a well, and alike in the Muslim practice, by setting afloat in a pond or river a little boat in which is a lighted lamp. Iconographically Khwaja Khizr is represented as an aged man, having the aspect of a faqir, clothed entirely in green and moving in the waters with a 'fish' as his means of transport.

The nature of Khwaja Khizr can be inferred from his iconography as outlined above, and also from the Indian legends. In the ballad of Niwal Dai she undertakes to obtain, for healing, the Water of Life (*amrit* /अमृत/*soma*), from a closed well. But when she reaches the well, she finds it is covered over by heavy stones, which she moves by her magic powers, but the waters sink down out of reach because Khwaja Khizr, their master, will not release them until Niwal Dai, whom none but her own parents Vasuki and his queen Padma have ever yet seen, permits herself to be seen; when Niwal Dai shows herself, then Khwaja Khizr sends the waters bubbling up.

So here we have Khwaja Khizr in India as the controller of a well in which are the waters of healing, the water of life. I have found maybe four or five other Indian myths that mention al-Khīḍr الخضر in one way or another and all of them, sometimes in a very roundabout fashion, connect al-Khīḍr الخضر to the waters of life or the waters of healing or a well or a miraculous fountain of water.

In my own life I had a similar "encounter" with a being whom I believe was al-Khīḍr الخضر.

At that time I was in my late twenties and not yet a Muslim and confused as to what was the "right way" or "the straight path".

I was living and working on a ranch of a wealthy absentee land owner in Arizona where one of my duties was daily to walk and water the horses.

The ranch was located on the banks of a long dried-out river, the Hasayampa, which has been sucked dry by the voracious thirst of the growing city of Phoenix. Daily I would take one of the horses five miles upstream to where there was a spring and then back again.

I used the ride as a sort of ambulatory meditation on the subject of “the straight path” etc and also to contemplate the beautiful colors of the lichens which had grown over the desert rocks.

I set off one winter day on the long sandy upstream course of the old river bed to the spring where I would water the horse and then turn around and come back down the same sandy path.

On that day I reached my destination in a very worn out condition and decided, after hobbling the horse, to take a nap by the spring.

I fell asleep and then was awaked by a man all dressed in green, not a bright green but a forest ranger green which kind of fit into the desert landscape – muted – you might say. In any case after waking me up, all of this was quite real by the way, he spoke to me and told me to call the number of a Pīr I had been thinking of studying with in California at which point I sort of drifted back into sleep and actually quite forgot the intensely real dream (*ru'yah* / رؤى) until, while riding back to the stables, the whole scene came flooding back.

After I returned to the ranch and stabled the horse I was sitting outside the stable when the whole *ru'yah* again came very vividly back into my consciousness and, without a second thought, I called the number and that night, after asking the ranch foreman for leave, took a bus to California and, indeed, my whole life changed. Just under one month later I found myself travelling in India where I made my first contact with Muslims at the Nizāmuddin Awliyā^o in Dehli and, as things go, one thing led to another and in the course of a few years I wound up making my *shahadah* in al-Quds ash-Sharīf.

So in reading all the parables and stories about al-Khidr عليه السلام I always have this personal event in the back of my mind and so take them all very personally as he is very real (and still quite present) to me.

Ibn ʿAta^o-Illāh رحمه الله in *Lata'if al-Minan* (1:84-98) states that there is consensus among the Sufis that al-Khidr عليه السلام is alive – I concur.

Among the strongest transmitted proofs to this effect are two reports, one narrated by ʿImām Aḥmad in *al-Zuhd* (الزهد) in which the Prophet ﷺ said that ʿIlyas^o عليه السلام and al-Khidr عليه السلام meet every year and spend the month of Ramaḍān in al-Quds, and the other, narrated by Yaʿqub ibn Sufyan from ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, whereby a man he was seen walking with was actually al-Khidr عليه السلام. Ibn Hajar declared the chain of the first fair and that of the second sound in *Fath al-Bari* (1959 ed. 6:435).

He goes on to cite another sound report narrated by Ibn ʿAsakir from Abu Zurʿa ar-Razi whereby the latter met al-Khḍr ؑ twice, once in his young age, the other in his old age, but al-Khḍr ؑ himself had not changed in the least.

The muḥadithūn as-Sakhawī stated: “It is well-known that al-Nawwawī used to meet with al-Khḍr ؑ and converse with him among many other unveilings (*mukāshafāt*).”¹⁰

One of the stories which quite draws me is the of the finding of the Fountain of the Water of Life by the prophets ʿIlyās and al-Khḍr ؑ.

The finding of the Fountain by Elijah (ʿIlyās/إلياس) ؑ and al-Khḍr ؑ occurs in Persian art as the subject of miniatures illustrating the *Iskandar Nama*. One of these, from a late sixteenth century manuscript belonging to Mr A. Sakisian, is reproduced in color as frontispiece to his *La Miniature Persane*, 1929, and in monochrome by L. Binyon, *Persian Painting*, 1933, Plate LXIa. In it the two prophets are seated by the Well in a verdant landscape, two fish are seen lying on a platter and a third, evidently alive, is in the hand of al-Khḍr ؑ; it is clear that he is pointing out to ʿIlyas ؑ the significance of the miracle. ʿIlyas ؑ is robed in blue and al-Khḍr ؑ wears a green robe with a brown cloak.



Prophet ʿIlyas (إلياس) ؑ or Elijah is mentioned in the Qurʾān, where Allāh ﷻ narrates that ʿIlyās ؑ told his people to come to the worship of Allāh ﷻ and leave the worship of Bāl, a Canaanite fertility ‘god’.

﴿وَإِنَّا إِلْيَاسَ لَمِّنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ﴾

wa-ʿinna ʿilyāsa lamina-l-mursalīn

Elijah (ʿIlyās) was one of the Messengers.

(Sūratu-s-Sāffat 37:123).

10. as-Sakhawī, *Tarjima Shaykh al-Islam Qutb al-Awliyaʿ al-Kiram wa Faqih al-Anam Muhyi al-Sunna wa Mumit al-Bidʿa Abi Zakariyya Muhyi al-Din al-Nawwawī* (Biography of the Shaykh of Islam, the Pole of the Noble Saints and Jurist of Mankind, the Reviver of the Sunna and Slayer of Innovation Abu Zakariyya Muhyiddin al-Nawwawī) (Cairo: Jamʿiyya al-Nashr wa al-Taʿlif al-Azhariyya, 1354/1935 p. 33).

“When he said to his people: “Will you not be aware of Allāh? “Will you call upon Ba’al (بعل) and leave the Best of Creators, Allāh, your Sustainer and Cherisher and the Sustainer and Cherisher of your fathers of old?” (Sūratu-s-Sāffat 37:124-126)

Allāh ﷻ makes it clear that the majority of the people of ʾIlyāsʿa ﷺ denied him and continued to follow Ba’al. However, it mentions that a small number of devoted servants of Allāh ﷻ from among them followed ʾIlyās ﷺ and believed in and worshiped Allāh ﷻ.

Muslim literature and tradition recounts that ʾIlyās ﷺ preached to the Banī Isrāʾīl when they were ruled over by Ahab and later his son Ahaziah. ʾIlyās ﷺ is believed to have preached with zeal to Ahab and his wife Jezebel, who according to Muslim tradition was partly responsible for the worship of false idols in Canaan (כנען). Muslims believe that it was because the majority of people refused to listen to ʾIlyās ﷺ (Elijah) that ʾIlyāsʿa ﷺ (إليشا/إليسع/Elisha) came after him to continue preaching the message of Allāh ﷻ to Banī Israel. He was a prophet of the desert like Yahyā ﷺ (يحيى), John the Baptist.

ʾIlyās ﷺ has been the subject of legends and folktales in Muslim culture, usually involving his meeting with al-Khīḍr ﷺ, and in one legend, with Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ himself when he ﷺ and al-Khīḍr ﷺ appeared at the funeral of the Prophet ﷺ.

There are reports from al-Bayhaqī in his *Dalaʾil an-Nubawwah* that al-Khīḍr ﷺ was present at the funeral of the Prophet ﷺ and was recognized only by Abu Bakr ﷺ and ʿAlī ﷺ from amongst the rest of the companions, and where he came to show his grief and sadness at the passing away of the Prophet ﷺ. The appearance of al-Khīḍr ﷺ at the funeral of the Prophet ﷺ is related as follows: “A powerful-looking, fine featured, handsome man with a long white beard came leaping over the backs of the people till he reached where the sacred body lay. Weeping bitterly, he turned toward the Companions and paid his condolences. Abu Bakr ﷺ and ʿAlī ﷺ said that he was al-Khīḍr ﷺ.” (ʾIbn al-Jazarī 1994, p. 228.)

Most such legends are regarded as folktales rather than actual events. In Ṣūfism ʾIlyās ﷺ remains closely associated with al-Khīḍr ﷺ. One legend we mentioned earlier was that ʾIlyās ﷺ and al-Khīḍr ﷺ meet together every year in al-Quds to go on the pilgrimage to Makkah. ʾIlyās ﷺ or Elijah is also sometimes spoken of as being the brother of al-Khīḍr ﷺ as well as one who also drank from the Fountain of Youth...*wa-llāhu ʿalim*.

In another narration al-Khīḍr meets with ʿAlī by the Kaʿbah and instructs him about a supplication (*duʿāʾ*) that is very meritorious when recited after the obligatory prayers. It is reported by Muslim that during the time when the false Messiah (ad-Dajjāl/الدَّجَّال) appears and as he approaches at the outskirts of the city of Madīnah, a believer would challenge him, whom the false Messiah will slice into two pieces and rejoin, making it appear that he caused him to die and be resurrected, to which this man would proclaim the falsehood of ad-Dajjāl who would try again to kill him but would fail and thus his weakness and inability is revealed. According to the commentators and transmitters of this narration the person who will challenge ad-Dajjāl and humiliate him will be al-Khīḍr.

Sīdī Abd al-ʿAzīz ad-Dabbagh says in *al-ʾIbriz* that al-Khīḍr is not a prophet but rather a *walī* who has the same status as that of the *Ghawth* (a level where the walī acquires resemblance to the heart of the Angel of the Trumpet, ʾIsrāfīl), and who attained this status in front of Allāh as a direct blessing.

And it is with these various stories and legends in mind that we move to the end of this bayān which centers around what is meant by “...who attained this status in front of Allāh as a direct blessing.” which refers back to the ʾāyat previously mentioned

﴿وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا﴾

wa-ʿallamnāhu min ladunnā ʿilmā

and whom We had also given knowledge direct from Us.

(Sūratu-l-Kahf 18:64-65)

as well as this very important quote which *must* be understood:

“The prophecy of al-Khīḍr is the ‘prophecy of walaya (*nubuwwatu-l-wilāyat*) whereas that of Mūsā is characterized as the ‘prophecy of institution’ (*nubuwwatu-l-tashrī*).”

The prophecy of walaya is mysterious but full of a strange lightening and ascension to different states of consciousness. All who come close to it are secretly, invisibly, completely esoterically, transformed in their interior consciousness which is, the embodiment of the secret knowledge, intrinsic knowledge through being itself, not the ‘prophecy of institution’ (*nubuwwatu-l-tashrī*), (the difference between ex-post facto legalism and living, loving, life giving insight into prophecy) as the story in the Sūrah Kahf of Mūsā and al-Khīḍr which we have cited makes absolutely clear.

In fact in the Qurʾān we find many pointers to a higher knowledge completely outside the Qurʾān...or the prophetic knowledge, which is the *ʿIlm-i-Ladunni* or “The Private Knowledge of Allāh ﷻ”, of which al-Khīḍr ؑ is guardian, keeper and dispenser.

Arabic is a very rich language and one word at times conveys many meanings. The word ‘*walī*’ means: friend, guardian, protector, owner, relative. The *walī* is the one whose instructions are followed, men obey his commands, the ways, customs and laws of the *walī* are followed (Qurʾān; 4:119-120, 7:3, 27-30). Secondly, a *walī* is the one whose guidance is trusted. It is thought that a *walī* is the one to show the right way and save one from error (Qurʾān 2:257, 17:97, 18:17,50, 45:19). Thirdly, the *walī* is the one about whom a person thinks that, what ever he or she does in this world, the *walī* will help him, (Qurʾān 4:123, 173, 6:51, 13:37, 29:22, 33:65, 39:3). Fourthly, the *walī* is the one who helps in this world through supernatural ways, protects from calamities, provides means of sustenance, grants children and helps to meet all other requirements – why we say *madat yā rasul-ullah*. (Qurʾān; 11:20, 13:16, 29:41).

At some places in Qurʾān the word ‘*walī*’ has been used in one of these meanings while at other places it comprehensively encompasses all the meanings, as when Allāh ﷻ says: “Those who take others as their ‘*ʾawlīyāʾa*’ (pl. أولياء) besides Him, Allāh ﷻ is watching them.” (Qurʾān 42:6). When the word *walī* or ‘*ʾawlīyāʾa*’ is used among believers it is used in the meanings of ‘friend’ or ‘protecting friends’: “And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends (‘*ʾawlīyāʾa*’) one of another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and they establish worship and they pay the poor-due, and they obey Allāh and His messenger. As for these, Allāh will have mercy on them. Lo! Allah is Mighty, Wise.” (Qurʾān 9:71).

Where ever the word “*walī*” is used with reference to Allāh ﷻ, it does not mean like human friends, but it is used in the meanings of Guardian, Protector, Owner: “Allāh is the *Walī* (Protector) of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them forth into light. Of those who reject faith their patrons (‘*ʾawlīyāʾa*’) are the Evil Ones: from light they will lead them forth into the depths of darkness. They will be companions of the fire to dwell therein (for ever).” (Qurʾān 2:257). “...He named you Muslims before in prior scriptures and in this (Qurʾān), so that His Messenger may testify against you and you yourselves may testify against the rest of mankind.”

Therefore, establish Salah, pay Zakah and hold fast to Allāh; Who is your Protector (*Mawlā*) – so what an excellent Protector and what a splendid Supporter!” (Qur’ān 22:78), “Surely those of mankind who have the best claim to ‘Ibrāhīm are those who followed him, and this Prophet and those who believe (with him); and Allāh is the Protecting Friend of the believers (*wali-l- mu’minīn*)” (Qur’ān 3:68) The *walī* is someone who has “*Walāyah*” (authority or guardianship) over somebody else. For example, in *fiqh* (jurisprudence), a father is the *walī* of his children. The word ‘*walī*’ holds a special importance in ‘Islāmīc spiritual life and it is used with various meanings, which relate to its different functions, which include as we have mentioned: “next of kin, ally, friend, helper, guardian, patron, and saint”. In Islam, the phrase *waliyu l-Lāh* (ولي الله) can be used to denote one vested with the “authority of Allāh”:

﴿إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ
الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ﴾

°innamā waliyyukumu-llāhu wa rasūluhu wa l-ladḥīna °āmanū
alladḥīna yuqīmūna-ṣ-ṣalāta wa yu°tūna -z-zakāta wa hum rāki°un

Only Allāh is your *walī* and his messenger and those who believe, establish ṣalāt, and pay the poor due while bowing down (in ṣalāt)¹¹.
(Sūratu-l-Mā°idah 5:55)

Additionally the word *walī* holds a special importance in ‘Islāmīc spiritual life and describes an innate sense of selflessness and separation from one’s own wants in favor of awareness of being under the dominion of the All-living, Self-subsistent one and of the need to acquire nearness to the necessarily existent Being – which is Allāh ﷻ. Individuals who have attained this level are believed to be both favored and living in a state of nearness to Allāh ﷻ.

﴿اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أُولِيَاؤُهُمُ
الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ﴾

allāhu waliyyu-lladḥīna °āmanū
yukḥrijuhum mina-ḍḥ-ḍḥulumāti °ila-n-nūri
wa-lladḥīna kafarū °awliyā°uhumu-ṭ-ṭāghūtu
yukḥrijūnahum mina-n-nūri °ila-ḍḥ-ḍḥulumāt;
°ulāā°ika aṣ°ḥabu-n-nāri hum fīhā kḥālīdūn

11. This last part of the °āyat refers to °Alī ؑ who once gave zakāt (زكاة) performing his ṣalāt by slipping a ring off his finger to a passing poor (*faqīr*) man.

Allāh is the protecting friend of those who believe,
He brings them out of the darkness and into the light.
As for those who reject, their allies are the evil ones,
they bring them out of the light and into the darkness;
these are the people of the Fire, in it they will remain.

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:257)

﴿أَلَا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ﴾

alā 'inna 'awliyā'a-llāhi la khawfun 'alayhim wa lā hum yahzanūn

Surely the friends of Allāh
they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve.

(Sūrah Yunūs 10:62)

One who has been favored with this state of being is called a *walī* or *wali-ullāh* (ولي الله), carrying the meaning of what is often called in English, a *saint*, (though we ourselves do not at all favor this translation as it is misleading). *Wali-ullāh* may also be translated as a word used to describe a certain group of people chosen by Allāh ﷻ from among millions of others to be His select friends because of their closeness to Him. And thus, a *wali-ullāh* is commonly thought to have favor in the “eyes” (so to speak) of Allāh ﷻ.

It is held that 'awliā'a of Allāh ﷻ, are exemplary Muslims, and represent the highest virtues and religious commitment worthy of emulation by other Muslims.

It should also be understood that 'awliā'a of Allāh ﷻ can be both men and women.

With these meanings, insha'allāh, understood let us return once again, to the important quote concerning *nubuwwatu-l-wilāya*.

“The prophecy of al-Khidr عليه السلام is the ‘prophecy of walāyah (*nubuwwatu-l-wilāyat*) whereas that of Mūsā عليه السلام is characterized as the ‘prophecy of institution’ (*nubuwwatu-l-tashrī*).” Since we have now understood the meaning of the walī and the 'awliyā'a let us try to clarify and understand the concept of *walāyah*¹² itself.

The word *walāyah* (ولاية) means “closeness, sanctity, friendship, love, authority, governance. Each prophet was succeeded by someone charged with the execution of the legacy left when that prophet died. Such a person is responsible for guiding the initiated believers into the correct interpretation of belief.

12. Also please see our bāyan, *al-bayah li-llāh* (Bayah is for Allāh) which discusses some of the events and implications surrounding Ghadir al-Khumm.

Such a person (and those who follow him in time) has a sacred initiatory mission and in that “station” (*maqām*/مقام) is the ‘friend’, ‘chief’ and the ‘master’ of the initiated believer and at all times those who are initiated believers owe that person (initially the *waṣī* or the legatee of religious knowledge and esoteric truth – ‘Alī (عليه السلام)) their unfailing love, faith and submission as their initiating guide. Whereas the Prophet (ﷺ) is responsible for delivering the message (*nubuwwa*) the Walī (ولي) is responsible for explaining the message.

So *walāyah* (sanctity, closeness, friendship) refers to the spiritual status of the first Walī (ولي) and then all of his successors/inheritors over time. The souls of the ‘*awliyā’ a-ullah* (أَوْلِيَاءُ اللَّهِ) possess sanctity due to their proximity or closeness to Allāh (ﷻ). In this context, *walāyah* refers to an exalted spiritual station in which the souls of the Prophets, ‘Imāms and ‘*awliyā’ a-ullah* are pure and reflect the transcendent radiance of the Divine Names and Attributes.

Walāya also denotes the essential nature and the ontological status of the figure of the ‘imām/walī who, in the ultimate reality of their being the locus (*maḍḥar* (alt. translit: *mazhar*) /مظهر), are a manifestation or vehicle of the divine Names and Attributes.

In this sense, Ibn al-Arabi and others have said that *walāyah* is superior to the functions of prophecy and messengership because it is a pre-requisite for prophecy and messengership. While prophecy and messengership come to an end, with the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), the station of *walāyah* never comes to an end, as each ‘imām/walī is the friend of Allāh (ﷻ) due to the spiritual sanctity of their soul:

“Know that *walāyah* is the all-encompassing sphere, thus it never comes to an end. When you observe the Prophet (ﷺ) saying things which relate to what is outside the law-giving function, he does so as a walī and a knower (‘*arif bi-llāh*/بالله العارف). Thus his station as a knower and a walī is more complete and more perfect than as a messenger or a legislative prophet.” (Ibn al-‘Arabī, Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One*, p.177). This is what is meant when we said of al-Khīḍr (عليه السلام). The *prophecy* of al-Khīḍr (عليه السلام) is the ‘prophecy of *walaya* (*nubuwwatu-l-wilāyat*)’ whereas that of Mūsā (عليه السلام) is characterized as the ‘prophecy of institution’, of legality, of *shari‘ah* (*nubuwwatu-l-tashrī*).”

In the realm of the exoteric (*adh-dhāhir*/الظاهر), the *walāyah* is symbolized by the Ṣhaḥādah. Anyone who recites the Ṣhaḥādah is a Muslim and belongs to the ‘ummah of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) – regardless of how they practice or what they believe theologically.

This verbal testification is an act of the physical body and need not even be accompanied by intention – in actuality this is how many tribes joined the ʾIslāmīc community during the first century.

In the realm of the esoteric (*bāṭin*/باطن), *walāyah* is to recognize the spiritual authority and sanctity of the Prophet ﷺ and his inheritors (*warīth*) and spiritual successors. The recognition of this spiritual bond with the ʾimām/walī is by means of the rational soul and is formalized in the rite of *bayʿah* or *mithāq* (covenant) after which one formally becomes a *murīd* of the ʾimām/walī and enters into the realm of *ṭarīqah*. In this realm, the believer's response to the recognition of the ʾimām/walī's *walāyah* is his or her undying love, allegiance and loyalty to the ʾimām/walī.

In the realm of the *ḥaqqīqah* or *maʿarīfah*, *walāyah* is witnessed through spiritual vision (الرؤية الروحية) or (*kashf*/الكشف) or discernment (*baṣīrah*/بصيرة) in which the intellect (*ʿaql*) of the believer comprised of the mind and heart, working together in tandem, witness the Divine Light manifest through the heart of the ʾimām/walī which amounts to a real “eye” witnessing” (*shāhadah*) of Allāh ﷻ that is promised to the believers in Paradise – but it can be realized in this world by virtue of the purified heart in the human being.

“Eyes see Him not through sight's observation, but hearts see Him through the realities of faith (*al-ʾimān*/الإيمان).” ʾImām ʿAlī عليه السلام (Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance*, p.29

So when we talk about al-Khidr عليه السلام possessing the ‘prophecy of *walāyah* (*nubuwwatu-l-wilāyat*)’ and Mūsā عليه السلام possessing the ‘prophecy of institution’ (*nubuwwatu-l-tashrī*)’ we provide a solution to the perplexing question of how it could be that someone who is not a prophet (al-Khidr عليه السلام) can function as a teacher to the acknowledged prophet of his time (Mūsā عليه السلام) in that whilst *nubuwwa*, in itself, comes to an end at each cycle of prophethood *walāyah* has no end.

Which is also why when we say that Muḥammad ﷺ is the “Seal of the Prophets” we also are saying at a certain level, “revelation” is finite but that there is a way forward since *walāyah* has no end.

وَمَنْ خَلَقْنَا أُمَّتَهُ يَهُدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ

wa mimman khalaqnā ʾummatun yahdūna bi-l-ḥaqqi wa bihi yaʿdilūn

among those whom We have created there are people
who guide in the way of the truth and act justly in its light.

(Sūratu-l-ʿĀraf 7:181)

“And know that all of the secrets of Allāh ﷻ are in the heavenly books, and all of the secrets of the heavenly books are in the Qurʾān. And all of which is in the Qurʾān is in al-Fātiḥah, and all of which is in al-Fātiḥah is in the basmallāh, and all of which is in basmallah is in the bā’ of *biʾsmi-llāh*, and all of which is in the letter *bā’* in *biʾsmi-llāh* is the dot (*nuqṭah*) which is under the bā’ and °Alī ﷺ, the Walī of Allāh ﷻ, said “I am the dot under that ‘bā’”

We contend that it is impossible for the Prophet ﷺ to have departed the world without first appointing a successor to preserve the *dīn* after him. This argument is based on verse 75:36: “Does the human being think he will be left aimless?” The old adage that “no religion survives the death of its founder” is seen to apply here; without a specific source of guidance, people would be left to try and piece together what they know of the religion, producing a patchwork of competing beliefs and theories (much like we see today). Sending the Prophet ﷺ would, according to a rational interpretation, require that someone come to stand in place of the Prophet ﷺ. Otherwise, sending him would have been pointless. The ʾāyah which states “Indeed, we have not sent you except as a warner unto all the worlds” would be rendered meaningless, since the generations that came after the Prophet ﷺ would be powerless to discover the truth of the religion (*dīn*/دين) in the midst of competing claims and interpretations. The question posed in verse 75:36 is, of course, interpreted as a rhetorical question, and as a challenge. When this verse is taken in context with the previous, the question is read as: “Do you think that we have not appointed somebody to answer your questions?” The existence of such a being would be indicated as “those charged with authority (ʾulī-l-ʾamr/أُولِي الْأَمْرِ)” in Qurʾān: “Oh believers! Obey Allāh, obey the Messenger *and those charged with authority among you*. ...” (4:59).

So while there can be and is no *successor* to the Prophet ﷺ in terms of revelation (*waḥī*/وحي) or prophecy (*nubūwwa*/النبوؤ), Allāh ﷻ clearly indicates in the Qurʾān that there will be “*those charged with authority among you*” as well as as another group referred to in 3:7 as “*those who are endowed with insight*” (ʾulī-l-bāb/أُولُو الْأَبَاب) who serve humanity by providing understanding and insight into the meaning of the revelation and prophecy, and that is precisely what is meant by the “prophecy of walāyah (*nubuwwatu-l-wilāyat*)” which is that form of prophecy that was held by al-Khīḍr ﷺ.

Put in a simpler way, perhaps, if we were to give a book on astrophysics to a high school student or, even, a beginning student of science in a university, whilst they would undoubtedly be able to read the words in which the book was written it is highly doubtful they would be able to *understand* the *aggregate meaning* of those words.

Similarly, even though °Umar ؓ proclaimed, when the Prophet ﷺ was on his deathbed, “We have the Book”, having the Book (al-Qur’ān) itself is no guarantee that one can understand what is revealed in that Book. Hence, even though Muḥammad ﷺ is the Seal of the Prophets and there is no possibility of further Revelation yet there is a very real need for Understanding, which is precisely what al-Khidr ؑ was providing to Mūsā ؑ through his teaching.

Yes, Mūsā ؑ had the Torah, but that was not enough, for although he had the Book still he obviously was in need of understanding and Allāh ﷻ wanted to make this clear to us, (both then and now) hence the parable or story of Mūsā ؑ and al-Khidr ؑ in the Qur’ān.

And it is precisely this “understanding” that is provided by *Walaya*, and the *’awliyā’*. So whilst there will be no further prophet yet there will be a constant need for *’awliyā’* to explain to the the *’ummah* what the exactly is the meaning of the celestial extra-terrestrial all-embracing revelation contained in the Qur’ān.

So whilst few of us would have the audacity of Mūsā ؑ in proclaiming that we “know it all”, all of us do have a need, as did he in truth, to seek out one who knows more than we do.

For, as you will remember, this parable or story begins with Mūsā ؑ making a claim about being the most learned of all men in his world.¹³ According to an ḥadīth, when once Mūsā ؑ delivered an impressive sermon, an Israelite inquired if there was anyone more knowledgeable than him. When Mūsā ؑ denied any such person existed, he received a revelation from Allāh ﷻ, which admonished Mūsā ؑ for not attributing absolute knowledge to Allāh ﷻ and informed Mūsā ؑ that there was someone named al-Khidr ؑ who was more knowledgeable than him.

This of course led him to undertake the journey to seek knowledge in which he vowed that, “I will not give up until I reach the meeting-place of the two seas, even if I must journey on and on for many years.” (لَا أُبْرَحُ حَتَّى أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقْبًا)

13. Muhammad Shafi. *Ma’arif al-Qur’ān* [Dar al-Ma’arif. 1978). vol. V: p59]

In the beginning of this bayān (بيان) the reader/listener will have come across what might be thought of as some cryptic words (which is only fitting because, in fact, this *is* a cryptic tale). They go like this:

“The mountain of Qāf is the cosmic mountain constituted from summit to summit, valley to valley, by celestial Spheres that are enclosed one inside the other. What, then, is the road that leads out of it? How long is it? “*No matter how long you walk,*” he is told, “it is at the point of departure where you arrive again,” like the point of the compass returning to the same place. Does this involve simply leaving oneself in order to arrive at oneself? Not exactly. As we have seen between the two, is a great event that changes everything; the self that is found is the one that is beyond the mountain of Qāf. It a superior self, a self “in the second person.” Of course it will have been necessary, like al-Khīḍr ﷺ (the Green One/الـخضر) to bathe in the Spring of Life. “He who has found the meaning of True Reality has arrived at that Spring. When he emerges from the Spring, he has achieved the Aptitude that makes him like a balm, a drop of which you distill in the hollow of your hand by holding it facing the sun, and which then passes through to the back of your hand.” If you are al-Khīḍr ﷺ, you also may pass without difficulty through the mountain of Qāf.”

Now when we say, “So that whilst few of us would have audacity of Mūsā ﷺ in proclaiming that we “know it all” all of us have a need, as did he in truth, to seek out one who knows more than we do.” we are pointing to the words above. One must need find one’s ‘imām.

If you want to *know*, you, like Mūsā ﷺ, must undertake the journey to find that “slave of Ours whom We had granted mercy from Us and whom We had also given knowledge direct from Us.”

Whether or not you will meet al-Khīḍr ﷺ himself, it is more than possible, even in our times, given deep determination (*himmah*/همة), you will, ‘iṣḥā‘ Allāh, at least come across one of the ‘awliyā‘-ullāh who will be able direct you to the Mount Qaf of your being.

According to Henri Corbin, “There is a spiritual place and a corporeal place. The transfer of one to the other is absolutely not effected according to the laws of our homogeneous physical space. In relation to the corporeal place, the spiritual place is a No-where, and for the one who reaches *Na-koja-Abad* everything occurs inversely to the evident facts of ordinary consciousness, which remains orientated to the interior of our outward space.

“It is a place, that resides in the soul; it is the corporeal substance that resides in the spiritual substance; it is the soul that encloses and bears the body. This is why it is not possible to say where the spiritual place is situated; it is not situated, it is, rather, that which situates, it is situative. Its *ubi* is an *ubique*. Certainly, there may be topographical correspondences between the sensory world and the *mundus imaginalis*, one symbolizing with the other. However, there is no passage from one to the other without a breach, a break. Many accounts show us this. One sets out; at a given moment, there is a break with the geographical coordinates that can be located on our maps. But the “traveler” is not conscious of the precise moment; he does not realize it, with disquiet or wonder, until later.¹⁴ If he were aware of it, he could change his path at will, or he could indicate it to others. But he can only describe where he was; he cannot exactly show the way to anyone.” But the *walī* ؑ of Allāh ؑ can, and that is his value to us because he knows “the place” and, moreover, how to get there if you have the will and can follow his instructions.

One such account describes a pilgrim passing his days, living at the edge of a sea in the Far West where he is overwhelmed by the kindness of the inhabitants, but in an anguish of expectation, he walks tirelessly along the beach, always watching the sea, toward the west, for the arrival of some ships on one of which is “one who knows”.

Finally he sees seven ships on the horizon that arrive and make their entry into the nearby port. From the largest of the ships descends a *shaykh* of noble and commanding appearance, with a handsome face and beautifully dressed.

A conversation begins, and our pilgrim realizes with astonishment that the *shaykh* already knows everything about him including his name and his origins.

It then turns out that this *shaykh* tells him that he has come to find him and has been designated to be his Companion, and that, together, they will soon take ship for the Green Island.

This episode bears a characteristic feature of the gnostic’s feeling that everywhere and always he is an exile (مغترب), separated from his own people, whom he barely remembers, and he has even less an idea of the way of what will take him back to them wherever “they” might happen to be or not to be or, even, who they might be now.

14. Think here of the place in the story where the dead fish suddenly slips alive and living in to the water at the place where the two seas meet.

They board the ship and their crossing to the Green Island lasts exactly sixteen days, after which the ship enters an area of fog where the waters of the sea turn completely white and then they see the Green Island on the horizon. Our pilgrim learns from his Companion that this White Sea forms an uncrossable zone of protection around the island; no ship manned by the enemies of the °Imām or his people, can venture there without being engulfed. Finally they land on the Green Island (*al-Jazīratu-l-Akhḍār* / الجزيرة الخضراء).

There they find a city at the edge of the sea with seven walls with high towers protecting the interior of the city. There abundant streams and luxuriant vegetation. The buildings are all constructed from diaphanous marble and the inhabitants have beautiful young faces, and wear elegant clothes. Our seeker feels his heart fill with joy, and from this point on, throughout the entire second part, his account will take on the rhythm and meaning of an initiation account, in which we can distinguish three distinct phases.

There is an initial series of conversations with a noble personage who turns out to be none other than a grandson of Muḥammad al-Mahdī, the Twelfth °Imām. He is son of one of his five sons, and governs the Green Island: his name is Seyed Shamsuddīn. Their conversations compose the first initiation into the secret of the Hidden °Imām and take place at one point in the shadow of a masjid and at another point in the serenity of gardens filled with perfumed trees of all kinds. After these meetings there follows a visit to a mysterious sanctuary at the heart of the mountain (Qaf) that is the highest peak on the island. Finally, there is a concluding series of conversations of decisive importance with regard to the possibility or impossibility of communicating with the °Imām.

I am giving the briefest possible summary here, and I must pass over in silence the details of the scenery and the other cities on the island, in order to focus only on the central episode.

At a ridge near the heart of the mountain at the center of the Green Island is a small golden shrine with a green dome where one can communicate with the Hidden °Imām by leaving a personal message. But no one is permitted to go up to this shrine except Seyed Shamsuddīn. This small shrine stands in the shadow of the Tūba tree which is the name of the tree that shades the Garden of Firdous (فردوس); it is, in fact, the Tree of Being.

[Note: The Prophet ﷺ said: “Tūba is a tree in Paradise, one hundred years wide. The clothes of the people of Paradise are made from its *calyces* (outer casing of its flowers).” (Reported by Ibn Hibbaan; see also *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jamī*^c, 3918)]

The shrine is at the edge of a spring, which, since it gushes from the base of the Tree of Paradise, can only be the Spring of Life (Sūrah al-Kahf 18:60-65). In order to confirm this for us, our pilgrim meets there the caretaker of this temple, whom we recognize at once is al-Khiḍr (الخضر) (the Green One).

It is there, at the heart of being, in the shade of the Tree and at the edge of the Spring, that the sanctuary is found where the Hidden ʾImām (إمام) or the ʾImām of the Time *may* be most closely approached.

We have learned, among other things, that access to this mystical shrine is only permitted to a person who has attained the spiritual degree at which the ʾImām has become his personal *internal* Guide, and has attained a state “similar” to that of an actual descendant of the ʾImām (إمام). This is why the idea of *internal* conformation is at the very center of the initiation account, and it is this conformation that permits the pilgrim to learn other secrets of this Green Island.

He arrives on *Jumuʿah* (Friday) the day especially dedicated to the Twelfth ʾImām (إمام). Moreover he arrives (according to the lunar calendar) at the middle of the month marking the midpoint of the lunar cycle, which is the middle of the month of Ṣhaʿbān (شعبان), which is also the date of the birth of the Hidden ʾImām (إمام) into this world.

On *Jumuʿah*, mid Ṣhaʿbān, while our seeker is praying in the masjid, he hears a great tumult outside. His initiator, Seyed Ṣhamsuddīn, informs him that each time the day of the middle of the month falls on *Jumuʿah* (جمعة), the chiefs of the mysterious knights that surround the ʾImām (إمام) assemble in “expectation of joy,” a special term which means referring to the expectation of the final Manifestation of the Hidden ʾImām (إمام) or his rising (*qāʾim* / القائم) in this world.

Leaving the masjid, he sees a gathering of noble horsemen from whom a triumphal clamor rises.

These are the 313 chiefs of the supernatural order of knights (*rijalul-ghayb*), always present incognito in this world, in the service of the ʾImām (إمام). This episode leads us on gradually to the final scenes that precede the farewell in which he is told that he must leave the island and the same ship on which he arrived now awaits him.

Our seeker obliterates his tracks, but keeps some material evidence of his sojourn on the inviolable Green Island, the place where the mystical pole of the world, the Hidden ʾImām ؑ, reigns invisibly: the material evidence consists of pages of notes taken in the course of his conversations with the grandson of the ʾImām ؑ, and a parting gift from the latter at the moment of his leave taking.

This gift he will treasure for ever as it contains his pardon from the domain of dunyā as well as a written license (ʾijāza) confirming his entry into the realm of spiritual freedom and true understanding.

When¹⁵ he left the island and had again spent 16 days at sea, he reached a town in the Maghrib called Yūḥ where he sees a house that looks vaguely familiar which leads him to knock on the door whereupon a voice asks from within, “Are you a lover knocking on my door?” he answered, “It is I, one who is faithful and is a lover but who is separated from his own. I have been banished from my home and I have wandered far from those like you. In my travels I have been bound to the impediments of height and depth, of length and width; I have been imprisoned in the jail of fire and water, of air and earth. But now that I have finally severed my bonds and I need to seek a way out from the prison of this world where I had dwelt.”

When the door opened a bit he found himself in the presence of a old man with white hair who said to him, “Know that the world to which you have returned is a world of Mystery, the world of the Unseen. (ʿālamu-l-ghayb/عالم الغيب). Those who live here possess powerful methods and provide plenty of scope. One who aspires to join them must present himself to them and must put on their garments and be perfumed with their soft scent.”

“Where do I find the garments and where are the perfumes sold?”

“The garments can be found in the market of Sesame as leftover surplus from the remains of the Clay of Adam ؑ. As for the perfumes they can be obtained from the Earth of Imagination.”

“Or, if you wish, you may reverse this explanation. In that case borrow the clothing from the Cloth of the Imagination and the Perfume (ʿitr/عطر) from the Earth of Sesame for they are unquestionably two brothers or two sisters both belonging to the same world, as I said, called the World of Mystery, or the world of the suprasensory.”

15. What follows is a redaction of a story called “*The Journey of the Stranger and a conversation with al-Khiḍr*” by ʿAbdu-l-Karīm Jīlī.

“Then I went away. First toward the Earth of Perfection, the original appearance of Beauty called because of its aspects – ‘The World of Imagination’. In that place I was attracted to a personage of sublime condition and of a high rank who emitted a sense of sovereign power. He told me his surname was the Spirit of Imagination (*ruḥu-l-khayāl*) and his last name was the Spirit of Paradise (*ruḥu-l-firdaus*) and when I when I greeted him and stopped respectfully in front of him he answered me with many welcoming greetings

“I said to him “Yā Sayyidi. What is this place or thing called ‘Sesame’ (*Simsim*/سمسم) is left over from the Clay of ʿĀdam عليه السلام?”

“It is the subtle world,” he said to me “a world forever imperishable, a world that does not pass away with a succession of nights and days. Allāh عز وجل created it from that clay, he selected the seed from out of the whole mould, then He invested it with an authority that extended to everything, to the great as well as to the humble...an earth where the impossible becomes possible...where the pure figures of Imagination are contemplated with the senses.”

“Yā Sayyidi can I find a road leading to this extraordinary place, this strange and subtle world?”

“Certainly,” he said “When your imagination will have attained its perfection in all of it’s plentitude, your capacity will expand, but until it makes possible the impossible, until it can contemplate the suprasensory realities of the Imagination under a sensory mode, until it understands allusive signs and deciphers the secret of the diacritical points of letters it can’t happen. When it does you will have woven a garment from the suprasensory realities and when you put it on it will open for yourself a door into Sesame.”

“Yā Sayyidi, have I not already fulfilled the conditions, for I am already here and am bound by the hand of the concluded pact (*ahd*)? I already know, through revelation and personal discovery, that the world of pure spiritual entities is more manifest and stronger than the world perceived by the senses, as much for intimate experience as from visionary intuition.”

“Then, after a murmur, he made a sign with his hand and I found myself on the Earth of Sesame.”

“When I had penetrated into this marvelous earth I was perfumed with its subtle and strangely sweet perfume and I began to contemplate its marvels and strangeness.”

“Things so beautiful and so rare they still have not entered into your thoughts and cannot be seen either in our world or even in our imaginable world and I sought to ascend to the World of Mystery.

“At that moment I again found the Shāykh who had been my first guide, but I ascertained that practice of the divine service had made him very thin so that he seemed to be almost a pure apparition. He had grown thinner than I would have thought possible. In spite of this he had preserved all his inner strength and had the same creative spiritual energy. He was just as impetuous and resolute as before and just as prompt both to sit down and to stand up and his brightness was like that of the full moon.

“Having greeted him anew and my greeting having been returned, I said to him I wish to obtain access to the men of the world of mystery and meet with the invisible ones (*rijāl al-ghayb*/رجال الغيب) of the unknown. There is no doubt that I fulfill the conditions.”¹⁶

“Then” he said “it is time to enter. The time to reunite has come,” and with his silver ring he knocked on the door which hitherto remained closed. It opened wide and I went in and entered the city of that marvelous Earth; its length and breath are immense, its inhabitants have knowledge of Allāh ﷻ not like that possessed by other creatures. There was no one among them who allowed their self to be distracted. Its soil was pure white like winter flowers. its heaven green like emeralds. Its sedentary dwellers are from a pure race of high nobility; they recognize no king other than al-Khīḍr.

“And it was precisely with al-Khīḍr that I deposited my baggage. “Entering into his presence. I knelt down and kissed his hand and proceeded to present my greetings. He in turn bid me welcome as does one friend to another and invited me to be his guest and with a smile that put me perfectly at ease, he said to me , “Well now say what you have to say.”

“Ya Sayyidi,” I said “I’d like to ask you about your sublime situation since your condition is so difficult to conceive that my words become entangled when I try to describe you although some people blindly persist in trying to do so.

“I am” he said to me, “transcendent reality, and I am the tenuous thread that brings that reality very close. I am the secret of man in his very his act of existing.”

16. See my bayān (بيان) on *al-Mahdi* p50-51

“I am that invisible one who is the cylinder that contains the Essences and I am the multitude of tenuous threads projected fourth from that Essence as mediators. I am the Shāykh with the divine nature and I am the guardian of the world of human nature.

“I cause myself to be in every concept and be manifested in every dwelling; I make a *sign* visible in every sūrah. My very condition is to be esoteric. My situation is to be the Stranger, the traveller. My permanent dwelling is the mountain of Qaf. My waiting place is the Heights of Aʿraf. I am he who stands at the juncture of the two seas, the one who plunges into the river of Where, I am the one who drinks from the source of the source. I am the Guide of the fish in the Ocean of Divinity. I am the secret of the Embryo and I am the initiator of Mūsā عليه السلام. I am the First and Last diacritical point. I am the unique Pole (Qutb/القطب) that is the sum of all, and which all turns. I am the light that scintillates. I am the full moon rising. I am the decisive Word and I am the splendor of consciousnesses. I am both the desired and I am the desire of the seekers. Only the perfect man (*al-ʿīnsānu-l-kāmil*/الإنسان الكامل) the ingathered Spirit alone reaches and finds access to me. As for the others my station is above the dwelling place where they are established and they have no real knowledge of me and they do not see any vestige of me.

“On the other hand their dogmatic belief takes shape for them in some one of the forms of religion professed by human beings. They masquerade ridiculously in my name; they paint my symbol on their cheeks, they put my face on their doors and wave what they think is my flag. Then the ignorant and inexperienced rests his gaze there, and he imagines that indeed to be what bears the name “*al-Khīḍr*”

But how all of that is that related in any way to me and what do I have to do with that? Or rather, what is their poor cup in relation to my jug? Unless it is said, in truth, that this is also a drop of my ocean, an hour of my eternity, since its reality is but a tenuous thread among my tenuities, and that the way followed by those is a way among my ways? Then in this sense I am but a fallacious star.”

“I asked him then, What is the distinctive sign?” and he said to me, “This distinctive sign is concealed in the knowledge of the creative life just as the exalted knowledge involved is in the science of the essification of Essences.”

Then I asked him of the different categories of the men of the invisible, the men of the unseen, (*rijālu-l-ghayb*) the men of Mystery.

“There are some among them who are Adamites and there are those among them who are spiritual entities. They form six categories, the first category differing as to rank.

“The first category is the preeminent one; they are the Perfected Ones, the great Initiates who follow in the footsteps of the Prophets ﷺ who remain invisible to the creatures of this world because they're hidden in the Mystery which is designated as the plane on which the Merciful is enthroned. They are not known by the people and they cannot be described even though they are Adamites.

The second category consists of the intimates of the suprasensory planes, the Spirits that inspire the hearts. The spiritual Guide manifests by taking their form, in order that mortals be led by them to inner and outer perfection. They are Spirits; they are, so to speak, pure apparitional forms, in that they have the faculty of producing a visual representation of themselves. They travel, taking their departure from this visible world; they reach as far as the field of the mystery of being. Afterwards they may pass from the hidden to the visible state. Their breath is entirely a divine service. They are the pillars of the earth keeping watch for Allāh ﷻ over both the traditions and the precepts.

“The third category are the Angels of Inspiration and Impulses, who during the night visit the Initiates and converse with the Spirituals; they do not show themselves in the world of sensory perceptions; and they are not known by ordinary men.

“The fourth category are the men of confidential psalms and sacred song or hymns. Throughout their ecstasy they are perpetually out of their world. If one ever meets them, it is always in some other place than they were supposed to be found. They manifest to other people by taking form in the world of sensory perception. When spiritual people happen to meet them on these detours they initiate them into the mysteries of the invisible and inform them of secret realities.

“The fifth category are the men of the wild lands; they are the privileged in the world. They are a race of Adamites who can make themselves visible to humans and then conceal themselves. When they are addressed, they answer. Most often their dwellings are in the mountains and in the deserts, in streambeds or on the banks of rivers. Sometimes there are sedentary ones among them who choose some dwelling place among the cities where they reside for a while but it is a place in which they never really fully put their trust.

“The sixth category are those possessed of sudden inspirations of thought (which you must know have nothing in common with demonic thought). These are children whose father is mental discourse and whose mother is the active imagination. No one pays much of any attention to what they say. They are somewhere between the false and the true; they are both people who have lifted the veil and people who remain before the veil. They are many.”¹⁷

وَاللَّهُ يَقُولُ الْحَقَّ وَهُوَ يَهْدِي السَّبِيلَ

wa-llāhu yaqūlu-l-ḥaqqa wa huwa yahdi-s-sabīl

And Allāh speaks the truth and He guides to the Way.

(Sūratu-l-ʿAḥzāb 33:4)

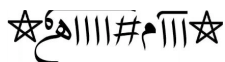
يَمْحُو اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيُثَبِّتُ وَعِنْدَهُ أُمْرُ الْكِتَابِ

yamḥu-llāhu mā yashāʾu wa yuthbitu wa ʿindahū ʾummu-l-kitāb

Allah erases whatever He wills or confirms it.

And with Him is the Mother of the Book.

(Sūratu-r-Raʿd 13:39)



17. The journey of Mūsā عليه السلام with al-Khīḍr عليه السلام was a journey both of Training and, to a certain degree, Hardship, as well as one of both Patience and Companionship and I sincerely hope and trust this has been true for the reader/listener.

There is so much more to be said on the subject of al-Khīḍr عليه السلام but the *raison d'être* of these monthly bayān (البيان) is simply to provide an introduction to certain subjects. I encourage the reader/listener to look deeply and search further.

It is important that I clarify for the reader/listener that al-Khīḍr is not to be confused and has nothing, in truth, to do with the “Green Man” of popular Anglo-Saxon and Celtic myth who was a legendary pagan deity who roams the woodlands and is usually depicted as a horned man peering out of a mask of foliage, most often made from the leaves of the sacred oak. He represents the spirits of trees, plants and foliage. It is believed he has rain making powers to foster lush meadows for the livestock. He was frequently depicted in medieval art and used extensively in church decorations and also on the doors of people’s homes.

I would, however, be remiss if I didn’t explain one more thing, and that has to do with why the figure we have been studying is called al-Khīḍr عليه السلام which in Arabic means “the green one or the verdant one”.

In ʿIslāmīc understanding the appellation of the “Green Man” refers explicitly to an ḥadīth in the collection of al-Bukharī where it is noted that our Prophet ﷺ said, “al-Khīḍr was so named because he sat on a barren white land once, after which it turned luxuriantly green with vegetation.”

Also note that we have been careful to mention that in the Qurʾān, Allāh ﷻ does not mention al-Khīḍr عليه السلام by name, as such, but rather speaks of him as someone who has total obedience to Him; a “slave” (ʿabd), who has “direct knowledge” and has “mercy from Us.” The name *al-Khīḍr* عليه السلام is given to this “wise man” and “slave” by our Prophet ﷺ but we not sure that al-Khīḍr عليه السلام is his real name or simply a title given to him by the Prophet ﷺ.

wa-llāhu ʿalim

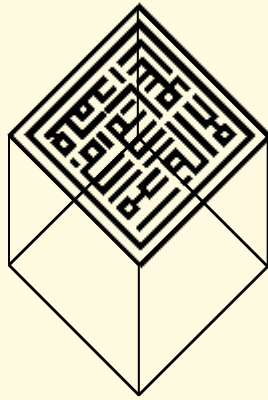


Masjid al-Khidr



Rare photograph of the Green Island
showing Mount Qaf above the White Sea
(author's collection)

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